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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 22 July 2014 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124 of 15 December 2005, by which the Assembly established the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Advisory Group to advise me on the use and impact of the Fund. In accordance with paragraph 21 of the resolution, I hereby submit a note on the meeting of the Advisory Group, which was held in Geneva on 14 and 15 May 2014 (see annex).

As summarized in the note, the Advisory Group expressed appreciation for the ongoing improvements in the performance and management of the Fund.

The Group considered a number of policy issues, including the CERF risk management plan, the independent review of its Performance and Accountability Framework, and the evaluation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of its utilization of CERF funds. The Group also received an update on the resource mobilization and communications efforts of the CERF secretariat.

The Advisory Group met with senior leaders from UNHCR, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, and discussed the ongoing efforts and initiatives to improve the timeliness of Fund disbursement to implementing partners, strengthening the strategic use of CERF and the visibility of the Fund. The agencies acknowledged the importance of CERF for their operations and praised the speed and effectiveness of the Fund. The representatives also noted that CERF was a unique and an invaluable life-saving financing mechanism that was constrained by its size relative to the ever-growing humanitarian needs.

The Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators from the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic and the Resident Coordinator from Uganda discussed with the Group their views and perspectives on CERF, the impact of the Fund in the field and the challenges they faced in ensuring that CERF funding was used strategically and for maximum impact.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of Member States and Observer Missions.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Annex

Note on the meeting of the Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group (14 and 15 May 2014)

Recommendations and conclusions

1. The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the use and impact of the Fund. The Advisory Group's first meeting of 2014 was held in Geneva on 14 and 15 May and was chaired by Catherine Walker (Australia).

2. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, briefed members on the use and management of CERF from 1 January through mid-May 2014, specifically highlighting the critical emergency assistance of CERF in response to the crises in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. The meeting was the opportunity for members of the Advisory Group to interact directly with the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators from the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic and the Resident Coordinator from Uganda. The members met with the senior leadership of CERF recipient agencies to discuss the timeliness of disbursements from United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the International Organization for Migration to implementing partners, strengthening the strategic use of CERF and the visibility of the Fund. The Advisory Group was updated on resource mobilization and communications efforts by the CERF secretariat. The Group, furthermore, considered and received updates on key policy issues, including the roll-out of the new Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators CERF reporting format; the CERF risk management plan; complementarity guidance for CERF and country-based pooled funds; independent review of the Performance and Accountability Framework; overview of the CERF grant management system; revision of the CERF training framework; and the UNHCR evaluation of its utilization of CERF funds. Further to those discussions, the Advisory Group would like to make the following observations and recommendations.

Management

3. The Emergency Relief Coordinator informed the Advisory Group that CERF had allocated $186 million to 21 countries from January through mid-May 2014, and she provided an update on the ongoing efforts to ensure the strategic use of CERF funds. She placed considerable attention on the CERF approach in responding to countries affected by regional crises, which was one of the Fund's comparative advantages. The Emergency Relief Coordinator commended the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, who ensured that CERF allocations responded to needs on the ground, as prioritized by Humanitarian Country Teams, and that they were used in coordination with other funding mechanisms, particularly the country-based pooled funds. The Advisory Group expressed its appreciation to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the CERF secretariat for their management of CERF.

4. The Advisory Group welcomed the opportunity to interact with the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators from the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, and

the Resident Coordinator from Uganda, to discuss their views and perspectives on CERF, the Fund's impact in the field and challenges they were facing with the use of CERF funds. They alluded particularly to the need to reinforce the rigorous prioritization process in their Humanitarian Country Teams, which needed to take precedence over individual agencies' priorities. They also emphasized the flexibility of CERF to respond to emergencies in various contexts, carefully balanced by the CERF life-saving criteria and requirement for strategic prioritization, as one of the major comparative advantages of the Fund. They reaffirmed that CERF remained the crucial live-saving financing mechanism and was both a catalyst and lever of humanitarian response and coordination.

5. Senior leadership from UNHCR, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator briefed the Advisory Group on the ongoing efforts and initiatives to improve the timeliness of Fund disbursement to their implementing partners. The Advisory Group was encouraged by the establishment of benchmarks by some CERF recipient agencies, which allowed for better measurement of performance, and recommended that all agencies establish internal benchmarks as a matter of priority. The Group also noted that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Financing Task Team was considering best practices from individual agencies, which could lead to improvements across the board in the timeliness of disbursement of CERF funds to recipient agencies' implementing partners. The Group encouraged the CERF secretariat to continue strengthening its partnership with IASC members within the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team. The Group will again address the issue and assess the progress made by CERF recipient agencies at its next meeting.

6. The senior leadership acknowledged the importance of CERF for their operations and praised the Fund's speed and effectiveness. Agencies maximize CERF funding based on their own internal subgranting procedures and financial mechanisms, as well as other funding resources available to them. They noted unanimously that CERF was a unique and invaluable life-saving financing mechanism, but that it was constrained by its size relative to the ever-growing needs. The representatives committed to assist with enhancing the visibility of CERF beyond its current stakeholders. They also committed to support the strategic use of the Fund, based on rigorous prioritization, thorough needs analysis and inclusiveness of the implementing partners.

7. The members commended the work of the CERF secretariat on resource mobilization and communications since their last meeting and acknowledged that the heavy reliance on major donors and lack of CERF visibility remained major challenges for the Fund. The Group endorsed the five strategic objectives of the CERF resource mobilization and communications strategy and encouraged the continuation of its implementation. The CERF secretariat was advised to maintain strong relationships with the major donors and to place additional emphasis on advocating for higher contributions from donors with untapped potential. The Group also encouraged CERF to work even more closely with the recipient agencies on joint advocacy and visibility efforts. The CERF secretariat was also advised to work towards bringing the Fund to the forefront of global campaigns, such as the World Humanitarian Day, and to define its engagement within initiatives like the World Humanitarian Summit. The members of the Group again recognized their own role in resource mobilization and advocacy on behalf of CERF, particularly in their own

regional groupings and countries, and encouraged the CERF secretariat to further elaborate on that engagement.

8. The members welcomed the piloting of the new CERF application template, which adjusted the terminology used with that of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, introduced a project log frame and aligned, to the extent possible, with the templates of the country-based pooled funds. Together with the positive experience from the introduction of the new, rolling reporting schedule for the narrative reporting of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, which reduced the agencies' reporting burden and allowed for a more timely review of and feedback for the CERF secretariat, those measures were improving the accuracy and timeliness of available data and increasing the transparency and accountability of CERF to stakeholders.

9. The members of the Advisory Group received an update on the semi-annual CERF risk action plan and again acknowledged its importance for risk mitigation and advocacy purposes. The members requested that the CERF secretariat proceed with drafting standard operating procedures to guide the actions to be taken by CERF, including timely information exchange with donors, should the CERF secretariat be made aware of a potential misuse of funds by an implementing partner. The Advisory Group will consider a draft of the standard operating procedures at its next meeting.

10. Regarding the issue of complementarities between CERF and country-based pooled funds, the Advisory Group welcomed the finalization of the guidance note on complementarity between CERF and country-based pooled funds, which had received substantial input from pooled fund managers in the field. Members emphasized that further harmonization between such funds and CERF would improve the overall coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian coordination and action. They also welcomed the recent positive examples of complementarity between CERF and the Common Humanitarian Fund in South Sudan, and urged pooled fund managers to continue addressing joint challenges, such as prioritization and monitoring.

11. The members endorsed the findings of the independent review of the CERF Performance and Accountability Framework and encouraged the CERF secretariat to continue implementing the recommended changes. That would strengthen the performance of CERF vis-à-vis accountability to affected people, non-governmental organization partnerships and complementarity with country-based pooled funds. The Group endorsed the selection of the Sudan and Myanmar for the independent country reviews to be conducted in 2014 and the planned regional review of CERF operations in response to the Syrian crisis, which would include the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

12. The Advisory Group welcomed the implementation of the new CERF grant management system and noted its positive impact on the availability of CERF project data and transparency. The members emphasized the importance of the alignment of the grant management system with the new United Nations system-wide enterprise resource planning system (Umoja) and requested that the CERF secretariat update them on the transition to Umoja at the next meeting.

13. The Advisory Group appreciated the UNHCR evaluation of the utilization of CERF funds, and encouraged UNHCR and the CERF secretariat to act on the recommendations from the evaluation in a timely manner. The Group noted that

some recipients were currently in the process of conducting their own study — such as the World Food Programme — and also encouraged other recipients of CERF funds, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund, to conduct similar evaluations, as recommended by the five-year evaluation of CERF. The members also requested the CERF secretariat to survey the recipient agencies about their evaluation of the two CERF grant facilities — rapid response and underfunded emergencies window — and report on their findings at the next meeting of the Advisory Group.

14. The Advisory Group welcomed the ongoing restructuring of the CERF training framework, which will strengthen its focus on the strategic use of CERF, based on lessons learned through the individual Performance and Accountability Framework country reviews, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators' reports, evaluations and humanitarian reform. The members endorsed the planned expansion of the training audience to include the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, humanitarian country teams and cluster leads, as well as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the Resident Coordinator and United Nations agency country office/regional staffs, with the overall aim to better facilitate the prioritization and submission process.

Administrative matters

15. The Advisory Group expressed its appreciation for the work of its Chair, Catherine Walker (Australia), and thanked Carlos Eduardo Zaballa (Argentina), Jan Vandemoortele (Belgium), Stephen Salewicz (Canada), Saadatou Mallam Barmou (Niger) and Biya Han (Republic of Korea), who are completing their terms in 2014.

16. The next meeting of the CERF Advisory Group is to be held in New York in late 2014.